



HOWARD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND ZONING
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TECHNICAL STAFF REPORT
Petition Accepted on April 16, 2007
Planning Board Meeting of June 21, 2007
County Council Hearing to be scheduled

Case No./Petitioner: ZRA-85 – Dorsey Family Homes

Request: To amend Section 128.G. of the Zoning Regulations to add a provision to allow traditional residential neighborhoods for developments of six acres or more within the historic districts or within 2,000 feet of the historic districts if located on a scenic road.

Department of Planning and Zoning Recommendation:

APPROVAL

1. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

- The Petitioner proposes an amendment to Section 128.G. of the Zoning Regulations to add a provision for traditional residential neighborhoods within the historic districts and on developments of six acres or more within 2,000 feet of the historic district if located on a scenic road.
- The Petitioner states that the reason for the amendment is that many areas of the Ellicott City Historic District and its environs exhibit characteristics of traditional neighborhood design and would benefit from the proposed six acre minimum lot size which would allow certain properties to be developed using the principles of traditional residential neighborhoods (TRN) development. The Petitioner explains that the 20 acre minimum lot size required by the current Zoning Regulations for TRN design may be desirable in more suburban locations, but the use of the TRN design for properties in and near the historic districts, especially if located on scenic roads, should be encouraged since it is likely to be consistent with surrounding properties.
- The proposed amendment would add text to Section 128.G. as follows (CAPITALS indicate text to be added):

G. Traditional Residential Neighborhoods

The following regulations may be applied to developments of at least SIX ACRES IF LOCATED IN A HISTORIC DISTRICT OR WITHIN 2,000 FEET OF A HISTORIC DISTRICT AND THE DEVELOPMENT DERIVES ACCESS FROM A SCENIC ROAD, OR 20 acres in the R-ED, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-A-15, and R-MH Districts, which are Traditional Residential Neighborhoods as defined in Section 103. These regulations may also be applied to areas of POR or B-1 zoning that abut and are an integral part of the design of a traditional residential neighborhood.

II. EXISTING REGULATIONS

Currently, the Traditional Residential Neighborhoods requirements of the Zoning Regulations may be applied to developments of at least 20 acres in the R-ED, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-A-15, and R-MH Districts, which are Traditional Residential Neighborhoods as defined in Section 103.

A Traditional Residential Neighborhood is defined in Section 103.A.162 as a development in the R-ED, R-SC, R-SA-8, R-A-15, and R-MH Districts characterized by all of the following elements:

- a. A range of house types and/or lot sizes are provided.
- b. Streets are laid out in a grid or network with multiple links between points.
- c. Streets serve the needs of pedestrians and automobiles equitably.
- d. Building facades from a visual edge along streets and squares
- e. The streetscape is defined and enclosed through small setbacks, a consistent treatment of architecture and other design elements, and extensive tree planting.
- f. Formal open space areas such as squares and parks, and which are visually prominent and clearly defined by roads or other physical boundaries, provide a community focus and places for social activity and recreation.
- g. Civic buildings may be used to reinforce the identity of the neighborhood, providing places of assembly for social, cultural or religious activities.
- h. Off-street parking areas and garages are visually unobtrusive.

III. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A. Scope of Proposed Amendments

- The proposed amendment would reduce the required minimum acreage to develop a property using TRN design principles from 20 acres to six acres for certain properties. The properties affected by the amendment would be limited to those within the boundaries of the Ellicott City and Lawyers Hill Historic Districts which are a minimum of six acres, and those which are a minimum of six acres that are located within 2,000 feet of a historic district if the development derives access from a scenic road.
- Scenic roads are defined in Section 16.1402 of the Howard County Subdivision and Land Development Regulations, and roads which meet this definition are listed in the Howard County Scenic Roads Inventory. Properties over six acres in size which lie up to 2,000 feet outside of a historic district which would derive access from a scenic road would have the potential to be affected by the proposed amendment. Properties with this potential would be limited to those fronting on Main Street, New Cut Road, College Avenue, and Lawyers Hill Road.

PETITIONER: Dorsey Family Homes

The majority of roads within the Ellicott City Historic District are classified as scenic roads. Within the Lawyers Hill Historic District, only Lawyers Hill Road and Old Lawyers Hill Road are classified as scenic roads. The number of parcels in both districts over six acres which could be affected by the amendment is minimal.

IV. EVALUATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Relation to the General Plan

- The Petitioner states that the amendment would be in harmony with the Howard County General Plan Policy 5.4, “Reinforce Ellicott City’s role as the County’s civic and historic mixed use”.

This policy also recommends that with respect to new residential development, zoning in the Historic District be evaluated, and if appropriate, amend the residential provisions to ensure that new development will be compatible.

The traditional residential neighborhoods pattern is an established development pattern in Ellicott City. This pattern is based on a compact network with a mix of uses. New development, particularly infill on vacant or undeveloped parcels within established communities should respect the surrounding patterns of use. New development should be pedestrian friendly and more ecologically sensitive. To promote sensitive development of infill sites, a balance of flexibility and added controls will be needed.

The proposed amendment is generally harmonious with the General Plan recommendations. The amendment offers a degree of flexibility in designing new communities within the historic districts and in the surrounding community. The narrow, winding streets of the Ellicott City Historic District create a compact development scenario which is continued in certain characteristics to the areas surrounding the district. These areas within and surrounding the district are summarized in an excerpt from Zoning Board case 891M which granted an expansion of the Ellicott City Historic District boundaries in 1990. This report characterized topography and environmental features of the district and stated that development was limited by the river, great outcroppings of native granite, and hilly terrain. This pattern of environmental features (winding roads, hilly terrain, streams and the river) continues outside of the Ellicott City Historic District. The Lawyers Hill Historic District is also characterized by narrow, winding roads and hilly topography.

PETITIONER: Dorsey Family Homes

As development expands to areas outside of historic districts, alternatives to patterns created by standard zoning districts should be employed in order to protect sensitive environmental resources. A TRN development pattern would concentrate development in compact areas while preserving and protecting environmental features of these properties.

- The Petitioner states that there may be a few sites that are not zoned R-ED and are within 2,000 feet of a historic district and are greater than six acres and are undeveloped, but the majority of sites to which the proposal would apply are zoned R-ED. The Petitioner also cites sections of Chapter 6, Working with Nature in which it is noted that the R-ED Zoning District was adopted in 1982 as a substitute for conventional half-acre minimum lot zoning in the environmentally sensitive areas surrounding Ellicott City. This R-ED zoning allows only two units per net acre and clustering on smaller lots is permitted in order to keep development impacts away from sensitive steep slopes and stream valleys. In 1993, this district was also placed along the main stem of portions of the Patapsco River.

The majority of undeveloped sites that are a minimum of six acres, are within 2,000 feet of a historic district and would derive access from a scenic road are zoned R-ED. The proposed amendment would be generally harmonious with Chapter 6 recommendations for clustering on smaller lots to protect steep slopes and stream valleys and provide flexibility in development patterns.

B. Relation to the Zoning Regulations

- The TRN provisions of Section 128.G. were effective with the 1993 Comprehensive Zoning. The purpose is to allow the concepts of traditional neighborhood design to be applied to developments which are entirely or primarily residential.
- Under the TRN provisions, in order to achieve necessary design flexibility, exceptions to the setbacks for the zoning district in which the property is located are permitted.

For example, in the R-ED zoning district, the minimum setback requirement for structures in single-family detached subdivisions from an external street right-of-way is reduced from 75 feet to 30 feet.

The front or side setback requirement from an internal street right-of-way is reduced from 20 feet to 0 feet.

The required setback from lot lines is reduced from 7.5 feet to five feet provided a minimum of 10 feet is provided between structures.

PETITIONER: Dorsey Family Homes

- While the proposed amendment is requested for an R-ED zoned site on College Avenue, other properties which have the potential to be affected are also primarily zoned R-ED and exhibit the typical environmental characteristics of this zoning district. The proposed amendment would not increase the density permitted by the zoning district for any site but would allow flexibility in the site design.

C. Agency Comments

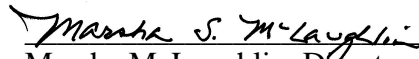
The following agency had no objections to the amendments as proposed:

1. Department of Inspections, Licenses and Permits

V. RECOMMENDATION

APPROVAL

For the reasons noted above, the Department of Planning and Zoning recommends that the request to amend Section 128.G. of the Zoning Regulations to add a provision to allow traditional residential neighborhoods of six acres or more within the historic districts and on developments of six acres or more within 2,000 feet of the historic districts if located on a scenic road be APPROVED.


Marsha McLaughlin, Director

06/13/07
Date

NOTE: The file is available for public review at the Department of Planning and Zoning Public Information Counter.

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